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THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

RADICAL criticism has of late been given a new impetus by the unexpected prominence accorded the work of Van Manen in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. The representative of a coterie — one cannot say a school — of critics who, despite their mutual recommendations, have never stood accredited by criticism in general, Van Manen must now receive an attention which is wholly out of proportion to the sanity of his views or the trustworthiness of his methods. In the work of the coterie to which he belongs one can see the limit to which a literary unhistorical criticism is to go. A method whose final criterion is one's likes and dislikes; which is controlled by a persistent determination to reject rather than to interpret references to things miraculous; which magnifies literary inconsistencies into doctrinal and historical contradictions; which, in supreme disregard of documents, can determine *a priori* what historical situations should, would, and must have been, cannot expect to win approval except with editors possessed of a monomania for the reconstruction of historical sources, or to carry the study of the New Testament farther than a condescending agnosticism. For its champions to maintain that they are not destroying the religious value of the Bible is a bit of generosity as naïve as supererogatory. It is undoubtedly true that the religious value of the Bible as a whole does not depend exclusively upon its historical elements, for religious impressions and inspirations may be taught by noble myths and sagas, even after they are recognized as mere pedagogical forms for the inculcation and illustration of truths. It

is also true that such literary elements may be discovered in certain of the stories of the Old Testament heroes. All this, and even more, may be admitted; but common-sense, as well as historical instinct, rebels when we are asked to believe that Christianity would have come into being if its historical basis consisted of a shadowy Jesus known to us only through a few self-depreciatory sentences; a semi-mythical tent-maker, "probably a Jew by birth," who made one journey of which there is little or no record, who had never dreamed of "Paulinism," and who is to be known best in a writing which is no longer extant; and a collection of pseudepigraphic letters written by a school who chose to bear the name of this "Paul," who zealously defended the apostolic authority of a man of whom they knew all but nothing, who created historical situations suitable to justify them in attributing to him doctrines of which he had no suspicion, and the need of which was not felt in their own day. Such a wholesale *auto-da-fé* of historical elements is at the expense of all historical method, of all sane criticism, and of all Christian history. So far from ridding the student of the supernatural, it demands belief in the most eccentric of miracles. In the place of deeds said to have been done by Jesus and his followers, it asks us to accept a miracle of literary and religious invention which has not even a scintilla of motive. Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are these creators of pseudepigraphic miracles in the interest of issues that never existed, and for the defense of an unilluminated, inefficient saint dead for a century—if, indeed, he was historical enough even to die?

At the opposite extreme from such positions as these of radical criticism are those of the extreme literalist. With him *THE CONSISTENCY OF THE LITERALIST* nothing is of value in religion unless it be based upon historical supernaturalism. To him that which is on the pages of the Bible is not only true, but it is authoritative for all times, and it matters not whether it be the duty of feet-washing, a prohibition against pork, the directions for healing through the combined efficacy of oil and prayer, the

speedy second coming of Jesus, or the command to love God and man. All are of co-ordinate and eternal importance.

An increasing number of men and women, completely ignoring the historical medium through which the events of the early church are seen, are holding to this literalism with a consistency that often shades into fanaticism. In effect, of course, they are insisting that the Christianity of today shall not only be the Christianity of the first century, but shall also reproduce the Hebraism of the earliest days of the Jewish state. But this consideration is not one to suggest to them pause. The Bible is God's word, and his word once uttered is everywhere, always, and literally authoritative. Such a position is intelligible, and is consistent. It is also inevitable once its premises are granted.

Popular biblical teaching, in so far as it is not carried on by men of this second class, attempts to avoid the extravagances of *THE ATTEMPT AT COMPROMISE WITH LITERALISM* literalism by an occasional recognition of historical values. It will admit that the teaching of Paul concerning silence of women in the churches was intended only for the Corinthians; that the command of Jesus given to his disciples for washing each others' feet was a recognition of oriental conventionality; that the references of Paul to communion with demons, and to the rock which followed the Israelites during their wanderings, were either of the nature of *ad hominem* arguments, or the use of current beliefs for merely illustrative purposes. Yet, while these concessions are made in order to avoid a literalism that leads to objectionable doctrines and practices, popular biblical teaching refuses to admit as a regulating premise of study that the Bible is always to be interpreted as are these particulars. Wherever a saying is not peculiarly objectionable to practical common-sense or some denominational creed, it denies that the student has any right to discover in it any element which is not eternally authoritative. Historical material may be used to illustrate, but not to interpret, biblical teachings. Beliefs current among Jews or gentiles are not historical media through which to see truth, but, if once used by New Testament writers, become *ipso facto* the content of Christian doctrines.

Such a position cannot for a moment hold its own in a debate with the literalist. The widespread distress which literalism is creating among Christian people cannot be obviated by any method according to which this teaching is local and temporary, and this other teaching is eternal, simply on the basis that it is "sensible" so to hold. The general position taken by current biblical teaching as regards the Bible leaves it entirely at the mercy of the faith healer and his confrères. There has seldom arisen a controversy in which the literalist has not won a technical victory over the semi-literalist. It cannot be otherwise as long as the two parties refuse to accept the historical point of view. To make permanent authority co-extensive with inspiration, and at the same time insist that certain elements of the Bible are intended only for certain times and places, is to invite defeat when dealing with the consistent literalist. And therefore it comes about that for apologetic purposes semi-literalism is open to all the objections brought against literalism, and is weakened by its own inconsistency.

Is there, then, no escape from an anti-supernatural literary criticism which strips the New Testament of historical value, except in a consistent, unhistorical literalism which would turn men and women into Jews of the first century in order that they may become Christians in the twentieth? In our opinion the means of escape lie close at hand in the very principles so vacillatingly recognized by popular biblical study—a true historical method of studying the Bible. Such a method recognizes the Bible as the repository of final moral and religious truth, but it also holds as a general principle that revelation is made through human history, and in consequence that, since it is progressive, each advanced stage of revelation renders its predecessor in certain respects outgrown. To such a view the successive stages of religious growth are of the utmost value, but are authoritative only in so far as each is embodied in the final revelation. It therefore holds that the first duty of the student is to understand a given teaching as it arose and was applied to a given historical situation.

The true historical method will also recognize the fact that the essential and permanent elements of Christianity may not lie in the media of the Palestinian or Græco-Roman custom or vocabulary or concept in which they found their first expression. The teaching of the different biblical writers is mutually complementary, not identical. Each is a phase of religious experiences and truth, and, short of the final revelation of God in humanity given in Jesus, cannot be final. Even in his case, the accidents of a historical environment must be recognized and estimated before he is seen in his fullest worth. In order to discover what is final in the teaching of Paul and his contemporaries, one must so study the teaching of Jesus and his followers as to distinguish that which he and they make the essential truth rather than the pedagogical or historical form. The method involved may appear difficult, but it is at least without dialectic jugglery. By the simplest of comparative processes one discriminates the grain from the husk, the spirit from the letter. Believing in a progressive revelation through a developing humanity, one seeks to distinguish that which developed from that which was its momentary historical phase.

A true historical study will not make hostility to the superhuman a criterion of this comparison. While by no means credulous, it will not be incredulous. Material which presents characteristics of legends must of course be treated as legendary, but matter which is difficult to explain will not be rejected simply on that account. Yet, on the other hand, it will not be shocked at an attempt to understand miracles. God is none the less in the world because his acts are understood and classified. The explanation of his presence may vary according to the habits of thought of different epochs. Divine immanence and inspiration are inextricably associated with any belief in God. Why not then seek to understand rather than to enforce interpretations given in unscientific ages to the manifestation of the divine energy?

It would seem that, so far as the use of the Bible is concerned, evangelical faith stands at the parting of the ways. Occasionally, it may be, its representatives may be swept by philosophical

presuppositions into a denial of historical worth to the New Testament; but the real choice lies between literalism of the type that of late has become so aggressive, and a genuinely historical treatment of the Scriptures.

*THE PRESENT
CRISIS*

Between representatives of the two points of view there may be, and we trust always will be, Christian charity and forbearance, but between the two methods there is no compromise. The situation is but a reappearance of the old question answered by Paul in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. The new Judaism in Christianity seeks to re-enact an outgrown law and to bring Christianity under the bond of an ancient past; the new Paulinism seeks to find its supreme authority in the work of the Spirit in the life of the follower of Jesus, and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free. Both parties are seriously, passionately devoted to truth; neither would under any consideration consciously detract from the supremacy of Jesus, or from the necessity of religious experience. The question concerns simply the authority to be assigned to the forms and the earlier stages of revelation which both admit to have been progressive.

There can be but one alternative; if Christian teachers insist that one must accept the unhistorical treatment of the Bible, the masses will grow atheistic, and the educated classes will grow agnostic. If a truly religious and historical treatment be accorded the Bible, Christianity will grow less insistent upon logic and more devoted to humanity—that is, more Christlike.

There is need of a modern Paul.